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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a functional approach to the performance appraisal of school psychologists, citing the high likelihood of increased public demand for accountability from human service professionals and a paucity of systematic efforts to appraise the performance of school psychologists as evidence of the importance of this topic. A functional approach to performance appraisal is defined as one that facilitates the improvement of a school psychologist's performance. It is argued that the functionality of performance appraisal is enhanced by setting the conditions for supervisees (school psychologists) to participate in the appraisal process. Factors that seem to mediate the relationship between participation and its potential benefits are delineated. The dimension of performance (what a school psychologist does) as an appraisal target is distinguished from competence and effectiveness. Based on the importance of maximizing the fairness and functionality of performance appraisal, it is suggested that the focus of appraisal efforts be on the performance (not competence or effectiveness) of school psychologists. A recommended process for appraising the performance of school psychologists is outlined which involves the following activities: (1) determining what categories of performance should be appraised; (2) constructing appraisal scales; (3) developing a plan for collecting data about performance; (4) using a scale to rate performance; (5) selecting performance categories for improvement efforts; and (6) maintaining performance improvement. (Author/NB)

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A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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Abstract

A functional approach to the performance appraisal of school psychologists is discussed. The high likelihood of increased public demand for accountability from human service professionals and a paucity of systematic efforts to appraise the performance of school psychologists underscores the importance of this topic. As defined in the context of this paper, a functional approach to performance appraisal is one that facilitates the improvement of a school psychologist's performance. It is argued that the functionality of performance appraisal is enhanced by setting the conditions for supervisees (school psychologists) to participate in the appraisal process. Factors that seem to mediate the relationship between participation and its potential benefits are delineated. The dimension of performance (what a school psychologist does) as an appraisal target is distinquised from competence and effectiveness. Based on the importance of maximizing the fairness and functionality of perfornance appraisal, it is suggested that the focus of appraisal efforts be on the performance (not competence or effectiveness) of school psychologists. A recommended process for appraising the performance of school psychologists is outlined. The process involves the following activities: (a) determining what categories of performance should be appraised, (b) constructing appraisal scales, (c) developing a plan for collecting data about performance, (d) using a scale to rate performance, (e) selecting performance categories for improvement efforts, and (f) maintaining performance improvement.

Public concern about the performance of psychologists and related mental health professionals has recently heightened and is likely to increase for the foreseeable future (Fishman & Neigher, 1982). If the performance of school psychologists is not systematically appraised , or if appraisals do occur but are carried in a manner that is unfair to school psychologists, then it is possible that public support and funding of school psychological services will be sharply curtailed. As Zins (1985a) has noted, recent surveys indicate that there is a paucity of systematic appraisal efforts at the state level. Moreover, there is also a paucity of published guidelines about how the performance appraisal of school psychologists should occur (Zins, 1985b). This unfortunate state of affairs is compounded by the use of inappropriate procedures and materials in the appraisal of school psychologists' performance. The typical procedures and materials that supervisors use to appraise the performance of school psychologists are those that are primarily designed for teacher evaluations. Appraisal results for school psychologists that are based on teacher materials and procedures can mislead the public about the nature and scope of school psychological services. This in turn, might lead some to question whether there is a need for school psychological services. The other problem with using inappropriate materials and procedures for appraising the performance of school psychologists is that they have limited usefulness for helping school psychologists improve their performance and for facilitating their professional development.

One possible solution to these problems is for school psychologists to develop and implement their own materials and procedures for appraising their job performance. Furthermore, I argue that these materials and procedures should be functional. Though the term "functional" is commonly used in the school psychology literature, it is not often clearly defined. In one dictionary, functional is defined as contributing to the development and maintenance of a larger whole. In clarifying the meaning of the term, it is essential to delineate what is the larger whole. In this regard, performance appraisal can be said to serve one or more of three different functions: (a)

making decisions about whether a school psychologist should continue to be employed for a particular school district; (b) enhance compliance with school district or legal regulations in regard to employee evaluation; and (c) improve a school psychologist's performance or professional competence. Merton (1957) helped clarify the term functional by pointing out that a behavior can either be functional, dysfunctional, or nonfunctional. Functional implies that the behavior has overall positive outcomes, dysfunctional implies that the behavior has overall negative outcomes, and nonfunctional denotes behavior that has neither positive or negative outcomes. In other words, just because a behavioral routine exists we can not *ipso facto* assume that the routine serves some important function. In regard to Merton's conceptualization, it is possible that an appraisal can be functional in one sense and not be functional in another sense. For example, using teacher oriented procedures for performance appraisal of school psychologists might be functional with respect to complying with a school district's regulation, but be nonfunctional or possibly dysfunctional with respect to improving the performance of school psychologists. Nonetheless, the three appraisal functions are not necessarily mutually exclusive; it is possible for an appraisal to facilitate performance improvement and also help an administrator decide whether a school psychologist should continue to be employed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATIVE DECISION-MAKING

Sashkin (1984) has argued that 50 years of action research has, in general, demonstrated that participative decision-making is associated with positive effects. Among other effects, he asserts that participation has the following ones: (a) increases the probability that employees will choose more difficult and higher work goals; (b) although more difficult goals are set, employees tend to be more accepting of them because they participated in the setting of them; and (c) contributes to a more positive organizational climate. Jackson's research (see, e.g., Jackson,1983) indicates that participation is associated with increased feelings of autonomy and influence, and indirectly lowers employee absenteeism and turnover. In addition, participation has been found to

correlate with satisfaction (see, e.g., Cooper & Wood, 1974) and reduced role conflict (Cherniss & Egnatios, 1978).

According to Ritchie (1976) participation, by itself, does not ensure that the aforementioned positive effects will occur. Rather, he contends that at least six factors mediate the relationship between participation and its potential benefits. These factors are:

1. The degree to which employees have relevant skills and information to participate. For example, the inexperienced or poorly trained school psychologist may be ill-prepared for extensive participation in the appraisal process because of his/her relative ignorance of all job related responsibilities.

2. The degree to which employees perceive that their participation will affect outcomes. For example, if the school psychologist believes that his/her input will have little or no effect on the type of performance behaviors selected for evaluation, then he/she might be reluctant to provide such input.

3. The degree to which employees are motivated to participate. For example, if a school psychologist is not motivated to participate in the appraisal process because he/she is considering a major career change, then it will probably be unproductive for the supervisor to solicit more participation by appealing to the school psychologist's interest in professional development.

4. The degree to which participation is experienced as legitimate. For example, participation may be more effective if a school district has an explicit policy that performance appraisal should be a collaborative process.

5. The degree of perceived difference in status between employee and supervisor. For example, participation may be more effective if the school psychologist and his/her supervisor have had a similar number of years of work experience.

6. The degree of trust and support exhibited by supervisor for his/her employee. For example, a supervisor who is reluctant allow a school psychologist to exercise professional

autonomy, may find that school psychologist reluctant to discuss important performance appraisal issues.

Two other important considerations in taking a participative approach to performance appraisal are the "quantity" and "quality" dimensions of participation (Miles & Ritchie, 1971). Performance appraisals can differ with respect to the quality of employee participation allowed by the supervisor. Some supervisors assume that employees do not have any important information to share, and therefore, encourage employee participation merely as a human relations tool. For these employees participation is illusory, that is, their comments have no influence on appraisal decisions. In contrast, other supervisors believe employees are an important resource for information and solving problems. These supervisors encourage their employees to have extensive input into appraisal decisions. In part, because of their training in psychology, it is doubtful that many school psychologists would be satisfied with illusory participation. Furthermore, as noted by Sandoval and Lambert (1977), school psychologists' knowledge of psychological assessment make them especially well prepared to participate in the performance appraisal process. The quantity dimension concerns how much an employee participates. Miles and Ritchie (1971) assert that many proponents of the participation approach assume " the more, the better" and have labeled this assumption the "quantity theory". Based on their research results, Miles and Ritchie attack the quantity theory and suggest that there may be a curvilinear relationship between participation and outcomes; as participation increases, positive outcomes increase, but only up to a particular level of participation. After this level of participation is reached, increasing participation may be associated with diminishing positive outcomes. Furthermore, the optimal level of participation may vary as a function of the employee's experience. Novice school psychologists, for instance, may be less able to meaningfully contribute to the appraisal process than their more experienced counterparts.

A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF RELEVANT DIMENSIONS

Implicit in any systematic approach to performance appraisal is a conceptualization of relevant dimensions that can be appraised. Appraisals can be either unfair or unhelpful to the employee if appraisals are inappropriately or inadequately conceptualized. Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease (1983) have proffered one conceptualization that may be useful in guiding the appraisal process. These authors claim that appraisal involves one or more of three overarching dimensions: competence, performance, and effectiveness. Competence encompasses knowledge, skills, and values, the possession of which are assumed to contribute to successful on the job functioning. For example, a school psychologist may have knowledge of classroom-based interventions, skill in consulting with teachers, and value being involved in consultative activities. Moreover, the school psychologist is presumed to have a relatively high degree of control over these competencies. However, supervisors, and possibly teachers and parents, are not solely interested in a school psychologist's professional potential, they also want to know if the school psychologist can perform in a competent manner. In this regard, performance refers to what one does on the job, rather than what one can do (competence). Performance is said to be a result of the interaction of competence, motivation, and opportunities to perform in a competent manner. The aforementioned school psychologist may have the appropriate competencies, but not perform teacher consultations because of other required duties. For example, the demand for psychological assessments might be so high that the school psychologist has little time for consultation. Therefore, in appraising the performance of school psychologists it is imperative to take into account relevant contextual factors.Of the three dimensions, appraising the effectiveness of school psychologists is fraught with the greatest threat to fairness because the school psychologist has the least control over his/her effectiveness. Effectiveness is comprised of all the components of performance as well as the target's readiness for change. Not only may the school psychologist have limited opportunities to engage in certain activities, but she/he may have a very limited influence on the extent to which the target will change. To continue with the previous example, the school psychologist may be competent and motivated to carry out consultation, an opportunity may exist for consultation, however the student (target of change) may be highly resistant to change

because of factors beyond the school psychologist's immediate control. These factors may involve the student's history, medical condition, or home situation. In addition, effectiveness implies there are data to support a causal link between the school psychologist's actions and particular outcomes. In most appraisals such data are lacking. Because of these considerations, I argue that appraisals of school psychologists are most appropriately focused on the performance dimension, while taking into account constraints and opportunities to perform different responsibilities.

THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

A functional appraisal process, that is, an appraisal process intended to develop and improve the performance of school psychologists, is comprised of several interrelated phases.

Determine What Performance Categories Should Be Appraised

First of all, the school psychologist and his/her supervisor determine what performance categories should be appraised. Initially, this involves reviewing the relevant literature, legal regulations, and current job related activities. Special education laws (e.g., Public Law 94-192) and The National Association of School Psychologists' Standards for the provision of school psychological services (NASP, 1984) can be consulted about what types of activities school psychologists' should be involved in. This information can be compared to the school psychologist's current roster of activities. In some cases, job descriptions can be used to develop a list of current activities. If no such description exists, if the description is outdated, or is lacking in detail, then other means must be used to generate a list of activities that the school psychologist is involved with. One such means is for the school psychologist to keep a daily activity log for a specified period of time. The list of activities generated from the log can be supplemented by the school psychologist and supervisor brainstorming about additional activities.

The information from these various sources can be used to develop a list of observable behaviors that can be *reasonably* expected from the school psychologist. Next, these behaviors can be organized into performance categories. An example of a performance category might be:

School psychologist presents assessment report data and interpretations at preplacement evaluation meetings. After the relevant categories have been organized, the school psychologist in collaboration with his/her supervisor prioritize performance categories for possible appraisal.

Construct Appraisal Scales

Following the prioritization, categories should be selected for appraisal. The number of categories selected for appraisal should, in part, depend on resources available for the appraisal process. In general, it is better to adequately appraise a small number of categories, then to inadequately appraise a large number. Next, school psychologist and supervisor need to agree on what behavioral indicators reflect satisfactory performance with respect to each performance category to be appraised. Satisfactory performance is the minimally acceptable behavior relative to a specific category. Once satisfactory performance is determined, then it can be used as an anchor point for determining behavioral indicators of exemplary performance, as well as determining indicators for performance that needs improvement. Satisfactory performance, exemplary performance, and performance that needs improvement for each performance category can be used to construct appraisal scales, such as the one in Table 1.

Develop Data Collection Plan

As indicated in Figure 1, four different types of methods can be used to collect data about the work of a school psychologist. Questionnaires include instruments such as rating forms that use a Likert-type scale. These instruments can sample a broad spectrum of work behavior, but typically communicate relatively nonspecific data to the reader. Interviews also can assess a broad range of functioning, and have the additional advantage of allowing the interviewer to follow-up ambiguous responses. In contrast to questionnaires and interviews, direct observation can provide very specific data about work performance. However, direct observation can be very time consuming and can influence the school psychologist being observed to change his/her typical routine. Direct observation based on audio- and video-tape recordings might help minimize these disadvantages. Possibly, the most desirable method for collecting data about the performance of

school psychologists is reviewing their work samples. Komaki (1986) found that the most effective managers inspected the work of their subordinates as a means of monitoring performance. Supervisors, for example, can review the psychological assessment reports of school psychologists. This type of review can be used in conjunction with the type of appraisal scale presented in Table 1.In addition to selecting data collection methods, decisions need to made about who will collect data, as well as when, where and how much data will be collected. Above all else, a data collection plan should be practical; otherwise, no systematic data collection may occur.

Rate Performance With Respect To Scales

Following data collection, school psychologist and supervisor should rate (satisfactory, exemplary, or needs improvement) each performance category by using an appropriate performance scale. In order to facilitate the school psychologist's self-appraisal, both he/she and the supervisor should *independently* rate the performance categories. After all relevant categories have been rated, school psychologist and supervisor should discuss and resolve any discrepancies between their ratings.

Select Performance Categories For Improvement Efforts

Three criteria should be used to select performance categories for improvement efforts: (a) the extent to which school psychologist needs improvement in a particular performance category; (b) the relative importance the category has to one's work; (c) the relative importance the category has to one's long term professional goals; and (d) how much control the school psychologist has over improving the category. Relating improvement efforts to the school psychologist's long term professional goals is an often overlooked, but nonetheless important activity. Lawler, Mohrman, and Resnick (1984) found that discussion of career goals was associated with the perceived effectiveness of performance appraisal. In addition, it is important that improvement efforts be targeted toward performance categories that are most likely to respond to these efforts. It does no good to attempt to "move the unmovable. After school psychologist and supervisor have agreed on what performance categories will be targeted for improvement, short range (approximately, one week to three months) improvement goals should be set. Setting of goals should be based on

current performance levels as reflected in the appraisal scales. For example, a school psychologist who is functioning on the "Needs Improvement" level as defined in Table 1 might be expected to achieve the "Satisfactory Performance" level within two months. Finally, intervention strategies are selected. At least one intervention strategy should be implemented for each goal. Because of the psychological sophistication of school psychologists, they might be especially receptive to self-management strategies, such as time management ones.

Maintain Performance Improvement

Though performance can be improved, it should not be assumed that improved performance can be maintained over time without additional effort. One method of maintaining improved performance is to provide the supervisee with feedback about his/her performance. At least one study (Fredriksen, Richter, Johnson, & Solomon 1982) indicates that feedback should be given about specific behaviors, and the effects of feedback do not necessarily generalize to related behaviors. An example of specific feedback about a school psychologist's psychological reports might be, "Recommendations of psychological reports acknowledge contextual realities of classroom and invariably seem practical for a teacher to implement." This specific type of feedback can be contrasted with more general (and less effective) feedback such as, " Psychological reports have good recommendations". Furthermore, it should not be assumed that the effects of feedback about report recommendations will generalize to the writing of the results section.Two more points about providing feedback should be briefly mentioned. First, relatively frequent feedback (e.g., twice-a-week) seems to be more effective than infrequent feedback (e.g., twice-a-year) (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor 1979). Second, positive feedback is more likely to improve performance than negative feedback (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor 1979). Simply defined, positive feedback refers to informing the supervisee that he/she has performed in a satisfactory or exemplary manner.

Another method of maintaining improved performance involves providing the supervisee with intermittent reinforcement. As Craighead, Kazdin, & Mahoney (1981) note, though continuous reinforcement is advantageous in helping one acquire a new behavior, an intermittent schedule (i.e., receiving reinforcement after some, but not all appropriate responses) increases the

probability of an acquired response being maintained over time. A variety of reinforcers can be used with supervisees, including public acknowledgement of accomplishments. However, it is important to note individual differences: what one supervisee finds reinforcing, another might find punishing. The reinforcer, therefore, should be tailored to the needs of the particular supervisee.

A third method that might maintain improved performance is "upward appraisal". In upward appraisal, the supervisee provides the supervisor with feedback about the supervisor's supervision. Beer (1981) argues that upward appraisal can help set the conditions for constructive two-way dialogues to occur between supervisor and supervisee by making the supervisee more of an equal partner in the appraisal process and giving the supervisee an opportunity to influence an important aspect of his/her work environment. In addition, the feedback given to the supervisor may help the supervisor improve the supervision received by the supervisee, thereby creating a feedback loop that benefits both supervisee and supervisor.

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A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

1.0 Determine what performance categories should be appraised
- 1.1 Review relevant professional literature, legal regulations, and current job related activities
- 1.2 Develop a list of job related activities that the school psychologist is expected to carry out
- 1.3 Organize job activities into performance categories
- 1.4 Prioritize performance categories for possible appraisal

2.0 Construct appraisal scales
- 2.1 Select performance categories for appraisal
- 2.2 Assess performance constraints and opportunities
- 2.3 Obtain agreement on indicators for satisfactory performance
- 2.4 Obtain agreement on indicators for exemplary performance and performance that needs improvement

3.0 Develop data collection plan
- 3.1 Decide what data collection methods will be used
- 3.2 Decide when, where, and how much data will be collected
- 3.3 Decide who will collect what types of data

4.0 Rate performance with respect to scales
- 4.1 Independently, school psychologist and supervisor rate school psychologist's performance
- 4.2 School psychologist and supervisor discuss any discrepancies in ratings
- 4.3 Obtain agreement on ratings

5.0 Select performance categories for improvement efforts
- 5.1 Use criteria to select performance categories for improvement efforts
- 5.2 Set short-term improvement goals
- 5.3 Select strategies to attain improvement goals

6.0 Maintain performance improvement
- 6.1 Supervisor provides school psychologist with performance feedback
- 6.2 Select appropriate reinforcers to maintain performance improvement
- 6.3 School psychologist provides supervisor with feedback about performance appraisal process

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY: ASSESSING THE SOCIAL, AFFECTIVE, AND COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING OF STUDENTS REFERRED FOR PREPLACEMENT EVALUATION

Exemplary Performance: For 90% of referred students, assesses cognitive, social, and affective functioning by using at least two assessment methods for each area of functioning.

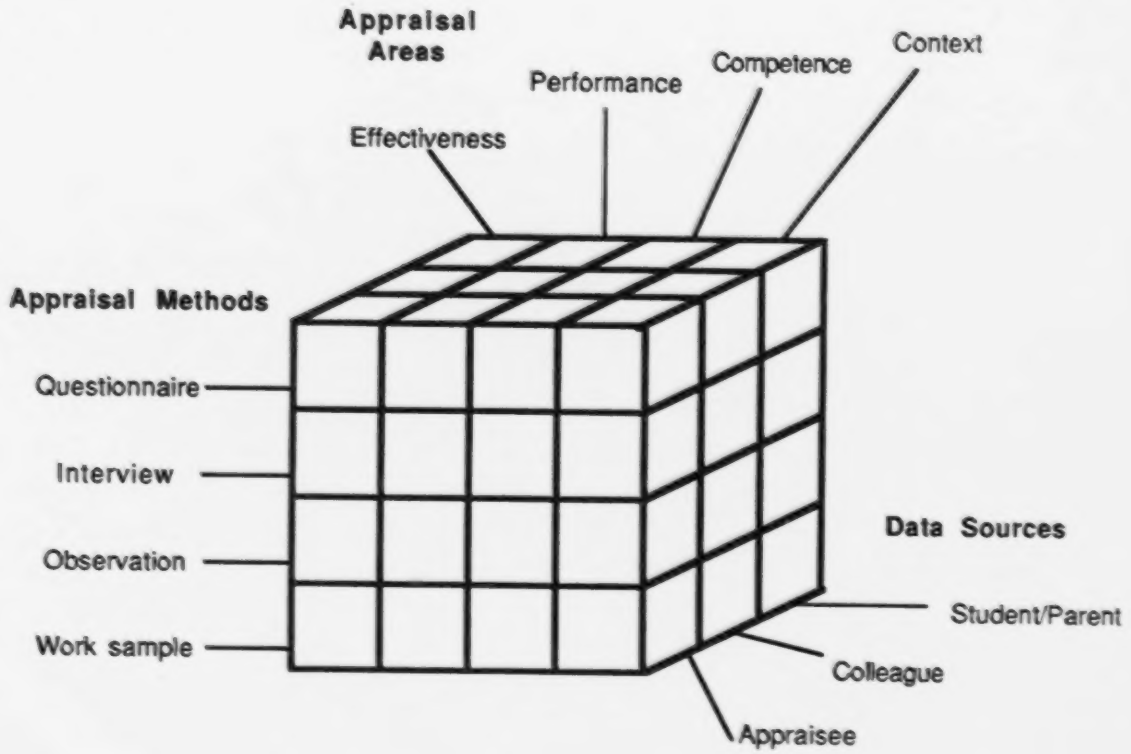
More Than Satisfactory Performance: For 50% to 89% of referred students, assesses cognitive, social, and affective functioning by using at least two assessment methods for each area of functioning.

Satisfactory Performance: For 95% to 100% of referred students, assesses cognitive, social, and affective functioning by using at least one assessment method for each area of functioning.

Needs Improvement: For 75% to 94% of referred students, assesses cognitive, social, and affective functioning by using at least one assessment method for each area of functioning.

Needs Much Improvement: For 50% or less of referred students, assesses cognitive, social, and affective functioning by using at least one assessment method for each area of functioning.

Table 1. An example of an appraisal scale for the performance category of psychological assessment of individual students.



Appraisal Areas

COMPETENCE - knowledge, skills, and values relevant to work duties

PERFORMANCE - the extent to which one's work duties were carried out

EFFECTIVENESS - the extent to which one's actions cause positive outcomes

CONTEXT - target's readiness for change, opportunities and constraints for action

Figure 1. Factors that can be considered in appraising school psychologists' work.